

1 The Ice Breaker

By now you've heard speeches by club members and have probably participated in Table Topics. Here is your opportunity to give your first prepared talk and "break the ice." The best way to begin your speaking experience is to talk about the subject closest to you—yourself. At the same time, you will be introducing yourself to your fellow club members and giving them some understanding of your background, your interests and your ambitions. As you prepare and deliver your talk, you will become aware of communication skills you already have and areas that require some work. Your fellow members will help you understand these needs, as they see them.

As you read through this project, make notes in the margin. Underline the key phrases to help you quickly review what is expected of you. Define the project objectives in your own words. After you have read through the entire project, you're ready to prepare your first talk.

Preparing Your Talk

The general subject of this talk is *you*. But that subject is too broad for a short talk—in this case, four to six minutes. Select three or four interesting aspects of your life that will give your fellow members insight and understanding of you as an individual. These might include your birthplace, education or family. Explain how you came to be in your present occupation, and tell the audience something about your ambitions.

Should you prefer to avoid autobiography, you might talk about your business, your hobbies, or anything that relates to you as an individual. Having complete knowledge about your subject will add greatly to your confidence.

Once you have the highlights of your talk in mind, weave them into a story, just as if you were telling it to friends around the dinner table. Share personal experiences of significance to you. The more personal you make your talk, the warmer will be the relationship between you and your audience.

Opening, Body and Conclusion

Like any good story, your talk needs a beginning and an ending. Try to create an interesting opening sentence that captures the audience's attention. Get it clearly fixed in your mind, and use it even if a better idea occurs to you just before you speak. Then devise a good way to conclude, and fix that in your mind. With a good start and a good finish, you can easily fill in the body of the speech.

In any speech, it's best to select a very few main points, three or four at the most, and expand on them by using examples, stories or anecdotes. If you merely state a fact and then continue, most of your audience will miss the point. You should make a point, say it again in different words, illustrate the point, and then state it once more in order to be clearly understood. This is a good skill to learn with your first talk.

What about notes? If you think you will need them, write a brief speech outline on 3x5 cards, which you can place on the lectern. Refer to them only when you need them. Remember, you're speaking—not reading. Many speakers begin by writing out

Objectives

- To begin speaking before an audience.
 - To help you understand what areas require particular emphasis in your speaking development.
 - To introduce yourself to your fellow club members.
 - TIME: Four to six minutes
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an entire speech, then breaking it down into parts, with a key word for each part, and finally writing just the key words on one note card.

Preparing Yourself

Now the talk is ready, but are you ready to present it? You will certainly need to rehearse. Practice the talk until you are comfortable with it. You won't need to memorize the talk, since you already know all about the subject.

Next, try the talk on someone in your family, a friend, or your Toastmasters coach/mentor. Then present your talk, and ask for comments. You may get some helpful suggestions. Try this with several people if you can. If you have a tape recorder, record the talk and listen to it carefully, making any improvements that are necessary. Using a tape recorder is one of the best ways to improve your speaking ability.

Rather than thinking of this presentation as "making a speech," think of it as a talk before a group of friends, sharing information of interest. Don't anticipate being afraid of the audience. They have already been through the same feelings you are having. They want you to succeed, and they're eager to help you.

Presenting Your Talk

Once you've completed your speech preparation. . .relax. Feeling a bit nervous is common to every speaker, no matter how experienced. In fact, you can put this nervous energy to work for you by using it to add excitement to the delivery of your talk. No one is going to pay much attention to a little quavering in your voice, and it will soon disappear, anyway, as you become involved with what you're saying. (More information for controlling nervousness appears on page 58.

While being introduced, take a few deep breaths and slowly exhale. This will help your voice sound resonant and natural. Begin by facing the Toastmaster and saying, "Mr. (or Madam) Toastmaster"; then face the audience and say, "Ladies and gentlemen. . .," or "Guests and fellow Toastmasters. . ." Pause for a second to let things settle down, then plunge in with your prepared opening sentences.

While speaking, make "eye contact" with various members of the audience, first looking directly at one person for a few seconds, then looking at another, so no one feels left out of your talk. As you're doing this, glance periodically at the timer. If the red light comes on while you're talking, move smoothly to your conclusion and finish quickly. *Observe time limits whenever you speak.*

Don't worry about what to do with your hands. Leave them at your sides if you wish. You'll have opportunities to practice "body language" later.

One final word: Don't end by saying "Thank you." It's the audience who should thank *you* for the information you've shared. Instead, just close with your prepared ending and wait for the applause (or stand back from the lectern and nod at the Toastmaster of the meeting, saying, "Mr. [or Madam] Toastmaster").

Your Evaluation

After your talk, you will probably begin evaluating yourself even before you sit down. You may think that you left out some of the best parts. Everybody does that. Just congratulate yourself on having delivered your first speech, and write down the things you did well and the things you want to improve. Try to avoid your mistakes next time.

To supplement your own evaluation, an experienced club member has been assigned to evaluate your efforts. (Check with the general evaluator before the meeting to make sure this has been done.) Before the meeting begins, hand this manual to your evaluator, so he or she may make notes on the evaluation page for this project. This will give you a permanent record of your progress. If there is something in particular

you want the evaluator to watch for, be sure to inform him or her in advance.

Get all the information you can from the evaluation. Ask other members for additional comments after the meeting. All of these comments may not be useful to you, but you should consider them carefully. Remember that the evaluations are representations of how you came across to the audience. They are usually—but not always—helpful to your self-development. It's up to you to judge.

SPEAKER'S CHECKLIST

- Bring this manual to the meeting whenever you are scheduled to speak.
 - Review your talk with your coach/mentor.
 - Discuss any special points with your evaluator before giving the talk.
 - Give the evaluator your manual before you speak, so he or she can make written comments on your performance.
 - Have the club educational vice-president initial the Record of Assignments form on page 69 after you complete each project. This will give you credit toward your Competent Toastmaster (CTM) certificate.
 - Don't be discouraged if your evaluator "missed the point." Evaluators have varying degrees of experience in speaking, and evaluation is a "learn by doing" skill, just as speaking is.
 - If you have not already done so, read pages 4 to 7 in this manual. They are very important for your understanding of how to get the most out of the Toastmasters program.
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Evaluation Guide for "The Ice Breaker"

Title _____ Evaluator _____ Date _____

NOTE TO THE EVALUATOR: The purpose of this speech was for a new member to "break the ice"—to introduce himself/herself to the club and get off to a good start in Toastmasters. The speech should have a clear beginning, body and ending. The speaker has been advised to use notes, if necessary, and to forget body language. Point the speaker toward methods of improvement, but don't "pour it on." Strive to have the speaker look forward to his/her next speech. Above all, *be encouraging*. Your evaluation should help the speaker feel glad he/she joined Toastmasters and presented this speech. In addition to your oral evaluation, please write answers to the questions below:

- What strong points does the speaker already have?
- Did the audience get to know the speaker? How?
- Did the speech reflect adequate preparation?
- Did the speaker talk clearly and audibly?
- Did the speech have a definite opening, body and conclusion?
- Please comment on the speaker's use of notes.
- What one or two specific suggestions can you give to help the speaker improve. (Focus on showing the speaker how he or she can make the greatest amount of improvement in his/her *next speech*.)